

Chapter Six

DISEASE, DEATH AND BURIAL

DISEASES AND THEIR REMEDIES

PROBABLY the greatest cause of physical distress is the tropical disease which is commonly called yaws. It is prevalent throughout a large section of Nuerland, although it has not as yet invaded the Lau country. 164

This disease is characterized at the onset by aching in the muscles and joints, then lesions may form over various parts of the body. The mucous membrane of the mouth and nose becomes inflamed. Large ulcers may form on the limbs; when they do, the aching in muscles and joints usually stops. The bridge of the nose may be destroyed by inflammation.

Yaws is spread by contact with the discharges of the body of the person affected or discharges from the ulcers. It is not of syphilitic origin.

Sometimes the ulcers are quite large and deep; four to eight inches of tissue may be involved. Others, of course, are smaller.

The Nuer tries various treatments which have been recommended to him by his elders. Certain leaves may be tied around the neck, a massage with hot water may be given to relieve the aching muscles and joints. The ulcer may be scraped with a shell, the edge of the shell having been previously sharpened. If a kernel forms in the groin due to an ulcer on the leg, a special grass is tied around the ankle to relieve it. The disease may wear itself out in time without medical care. 757

The Government doctors have trained some natives to give the intravenous injections of the drug which is used to eradicate this disease. These native men usually accompany the District Commissioners on their rounds 759 651

[p. 47]

DISEASE, DEATH AND BURIAL

757 to collect taxes, and thus come across many cases of yaws.
● 759 Probably few patients receive more than one injection,
651 for the Government officials do not stay long in one place,
but that at least does its bit towards the healing process
and also towards the prevention of the spread of this
disease. And no doubt this medical work brought right
to the Nuer's door, helps to alleviate the pain caused by the
loss of their cattle as they are taken for the payment of taxes.

743 During the rainy season when the Sobat river is
757 navigable, and in all seasons on the Nile, the hospital
boat—the *Lady Baker*—with at least one English physician
and his helpers on board, provides treatment for all cases
that can be reached in the towns along the rivers. In-
travenous injections are given, and dressings are done.
The dreadful ulcers receive one day's treatment at least.
All who come to the hospital boat are treated for their
various complaints. Those who wish may accompany
the doctor to the hospital at Malakal, where they will
receive free medical, surgical, and hospital care; they are
given free transportation there and back to their villages
again.

At Nasser there is a mission clinic. Here patients are
encouraged to stay until they have received four of the
intravenous injections and also a large daily dose of
potassium iodide. Their sores are also dressed three
times a week. Many, of course, leave before this course
of treatment is completed, but others stay until a complete
cure is effected. Skin grafts have been done at different
times, three cases have been really successful.

Other remedies, such as bismuth, have been tried at this
clinic, but beyond a palliative effect have been useless;
the result has been time wasted for the Nuer and no
definite cure. The intravenous injections were finally
found satisfactory.